

Richard Overy
Senior Planning Technician
Development Plans, Telford & Wrekin

Data Visualisation & Information Graphics

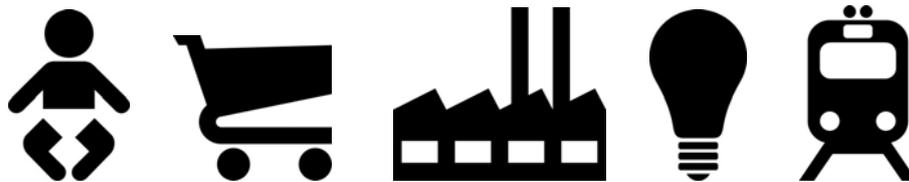
Please don't let the words Information Graphics prevent you from reading this article, I am aware that not everyone in the visualisation world is a fan of the information graphic or infographic; this may be due to visualisation snobbery but is more likely to be because although there are some excellent examples there are also some awful ones!

I facilitate a community on Communities of Practice called the Information Graphics and Visualisation Community. The examples below have been adapted and updated from the blog I write for this community:

The Noun Project

The Noun Project (so called as the majority are visual interpretations of nouns) is a website containing open source symbols, when combined with data these symbols can be used as a visualisation method. Matthew Rowett produced a practical example of how these symbols can be used in his *Britistics* (link below).

Since writing my blog in July 2011 the Noun Project ran *Iconathon*, a series of events across America in which volunteers designed civic symbols. The library is still growing and they need your help, if your symbol is used you will receive a t-shirt with your noun printed on it.



The noun project doesn't support Internet Explorer so you will need to use an alternative web browser.

<http://thenounproject.com/>
<http://www.behance.net/gallery/Britistics-a-UK-Infographics/1457231>

Photographs to Visualise

Photographs can be used as an engaging way to communicate data, Jose Duarte and Peter Orntoft have both produced examples of how photographing objects or people can be used to visualise data.

Peter's photographs use a mixture of people and objects to visualise data, the example below visualises fear of gang related crime. Peter's work is also featured in a new book called *visual storytelling: Inspiring a new Visual Language*.

Jose's photographs use a mixture of low-tech objects to visualise data including spheres, string and chalk, he even sells a kit to produce your own.

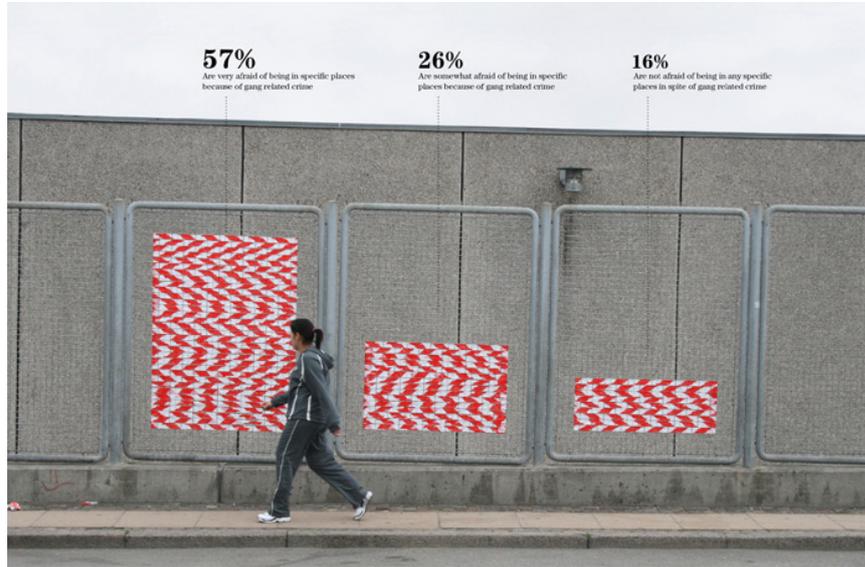
This method of visualisation has in my opinion huge potential; I'm hoping it will be used more widely over the next few years.

Jose Duarte's photographs

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/joseduarteq/5577157688/in/set-72157626819118313/>

Peter Orntoft's photographs

<http://www.peterorntoft.com/HTML%20filer/infocontext1.html>



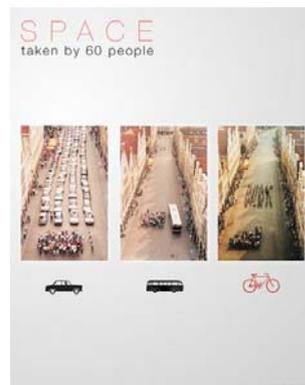
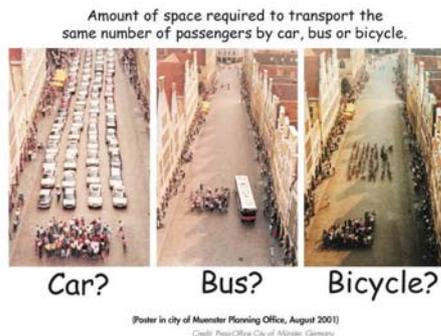
One of Peter Orntoft's Photographs

When Less is More

Less is more when it comes to the design or in this case the redesign of infographics. Sometimes this requires the assistance of a designer or fresh eyes to provide a second opinion. In the example below the reduction in the amount of text used, replacing some of the text with symbols, adjusting space, type and colour have all simplified this infographic and in my opinion this simplification makes the infographic far more powerful.

Original by Muenster Planning Dept, Germany

Redesign by Asa Raskin



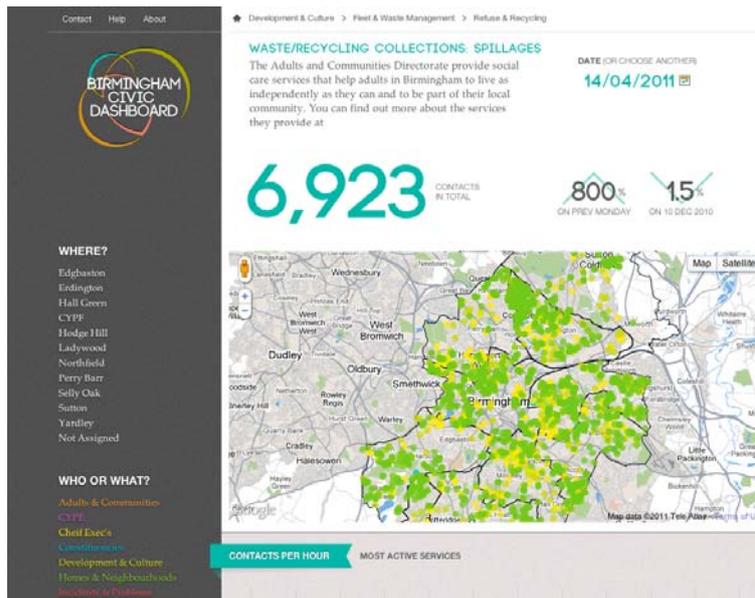
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asa_Raskin

Birmingham's Dashboard

Birmingham's Civic Dashboard visualises the contacts received by Birmingham City Council daily. It was produced by Mudlark for Digital Birmingham as Part of Nesta's Make it Local project.

The civic dashboard uses open data to provide the approximate location of the customer, method of contact and which service units were involved with dealing with each enquiry. The data is interactive allowing the user to select a specific ward/constituency or zoom in/out of the map.

An innovative project which illustrates what can be achieved through public/private sector partnerships.



<http://cividdashboard.org.uk/>

<http://www.weareudlark.com/>

http://www.nesta.org.uk/areas_of_work/public_services_lab/make_it_local

<http://www.digitalbirmingham.co.uk/>

How Many Really?

The Development Plans Team at Telford & Wrekin Council are about to start an engagement exercise, a key part of this work involves making the statistics real and understandable. For example 500 houses are meaningless without some context or comparison. In the past we have made comparisons to the equivalent number of football pitches but this can be confusing as pitch sizes vary (see the metric view link below).

How many really? Uses graphic objects to provide the context and scale to our own social networks and compares them with those involved in historical events, diseases, disasters and wars. It was produced by Berg for the BBC.



<http://howmanyreally.com/>
<http://metricviews.org.uk/2007/11/how-big-hectare/>

Horizonless Maps

Here and there a horizonless projection of Manhattan was originally featured in the UK edition of Wired Magazine (June 2009), this map was produced by Jack Schulze and his colleagues. The maps show Downtown/Uptown Manhattan from eye-level and a bird's eye view simultaneously, landmarks buildings are identified in gold.

The fly through video on Vimeo (link below) is also pretty impressive.

<http://vimeo.com/4410429>

Jack Schulze provides background on their influences in his blog

<http://berglondon.com/blog/2009/05/04/here-there-influences/>



Berg map

How to Survive a Plane Crash

This was surprisingly the most viewed of all my blogs with over 1000 views, perhaps it's because the blog title suggests information which could potentially save your life?

I'm reading Ben Sherwood's *The Survivors Club*, a fascinating book which discusses amongst other things the myths associated with flying. For example the myth of hopelessness - the belief that when a plane crashes the majority of the passengers die, in fact the opposite is true over 95%* of passengers survive (*National Transportation Safety Board).

I was hoping that in the unfortunate event of being involved in a plane crash that this book would provide me with the crucial information needed to survive. For example which seat would give me the best chance of survival? It seems that the jury is out on this one with conflicting research on where the safest seat is located. The graphic below is based on the Popular Mechanics Survival Rates and indicates the closer to the tail you are, the better your chances of survival.



Infographic produced by The Telegraph

However the latest research from the University of Greenwich suggests that the front of the plane is your best bet for survival and that the five row rule (a seat within five rows of an emergency exit) and an aisle seat are both crucial to increasing your survival chances.

Please join the Information Graphics and Visualisation Community and share similar examples with us.

<http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/c/10520247/home.do>